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Assessing of Iranian medical English journals based on journal selection criteria in Scopus

Shahram Sedghi¹, Somayeh Ghaffari Heshajin^{*2}

Abstract

Journals which have been indexed in universal citation databases can introduce their countries' scientific productions to the world's scientific communications. In this study, it is aimed to evaluate Iranian Medical English Journals (IMEJ) based on Scopus' journal selection criteria. This is a descriptive quantitative study which deals with the last issues of 52 numbers of IMEJ which have not been indexed in Web of Science, Scopus, and PubMed. Data is collected using a researcher-developed checklist whose validity was confirmed by faculty members. Microsoft Office Excel was used to analyze data. According to our findings, the studied journals were in compliance with Scopus' journal selection criteria in the cases regularity in publishing, providing informative abstracts for articles, limiting the amount of self-citation, providing XML format for articles, providing the online system for sending and receiving the articles, and providing author's guidelines. The low amount of structured abstracts, the low number of foreign authors and editors, and the low amount of Endnote output were the most important weakness in IMEJ. Suggested solutions were promoting the cooperation with foreign editors and authors, and providing structured abstracts, and EndNote outputs by journals and authors.

Keywords: journals, indexing, Scopus, Iran.

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Introduction

The basic source of current information that publishes at a particular discipline, is defined as a scientific journal (Sandesh & Wahrekar, 2017). Because journals provide more up to date information than books, they are one of the most important scholarly communication media for researchers (Chung & Tsay, 2017). In most areas of knowledge such as medical sciences, the scientific journal is established as an important source for formal scientific communication (Rodrigues, Taga, & Passos, 2016). Also, the medical science researchers want to publish their articles in the best journal possible which have been indexed in universal citation databases (Abrizah, 2016).

The most important international databases for indexing medical journals are PubMed, PubMed Central (PMC), MEDLINE, Scopus, and Web of Science (Huh, 2016). Journals position in these collections and particularly being indexed by Web of Science, Scopus, and PubMed (that are known as the best reference indexing databases) reflects individuals', institutions', and countries' research productivity (Huh, 2016; Yessirkepov, Nurmashv, & Anartayeva, 2015). Being indexed in each of these databases requires meeting strict journal selection criteria that generally based on journal policy, regularity of publication, diversity and so on (Abdekhoda, 2010; Huh, 2016; Taşkın, Doğan, Akça, Şencan, & Akbulut, 2015).

Scopus is the largest abstract and citation database with 22800 titles from more than 5000 international publishers that were introduced by Elsevier in November 2004. Scopus covers outputs from such diverse fields as life sciences (17%), social sciences (31%), physical sciences (27%), and health sciences (26%). Various physical formats of journals are included in Scopus and made up a large number of its' content ("Scopus content coverage guide," August 2017; Simone II, 2016).

Journals selection in Scopus is based on both quantitative and qualitative measures. Scopus has five main categories of criteria that are being used in the review process: journal policy with six evaluation criteria, content with four evaluation criteria, journal standing with two evaluation criteria, the regularity with one evaluation criteria, and online availability with three evaluation criteria. Each category and each criterion is scored in Scopus' scoring system and during the review, the scores are weighted. Scopus evaluates the journals based on the sum of these scores.

Six evaluation criteria under the category of journal policy include convincing editorial policy, diversity in the geographical distribution of editors, diversity in the geographical distribution of authors, type of peer-review, cited references in Roman script, English language abstracts.

Specific evaluation criteria under the category of content include the academic contribution to the field, clarity of abstracts, conformity with the journal's stated aims and scope, readability of articles.

Citedness of journal articles in Scopus and editor standing are evaluated under journal standing category.

No delay in the publication schedule is the only criterion under the category of regularity, and the specific journal evaluation criteria under the category of online availability include online content

available, English language journal homepage, and quality of journal homepage(Hawn Kim, 2016; "Scopus content coverage guide," August 2017).

Annually, many offers are evaluating by Iranian medical sciences journals commission for granting the scientific-research license and at present 259 medical English journals are being published in Iran and 88 (34%) of this journals are being indexed by Scopus("The list of approved journals by the commission of national medical science journals,").

The main goal of this study is to carry out a quantitative assessment of Iranian medical English journals (IMEJ) based on Scopus journal selection criteria. We hope to find the weaknesses of IMEJ that does not fulfill the criteria of Scopus and help to improve them to be qualified for being indexed by Scopus.

Literature review

Several studies from different directions in the field of publications have been done in Iran and foreign countries. One of the most important goals of these studies was surveying of the journal' compliance with journal selection criteria in the most important reference indexing databases in order to be indexed by these databases.

Abdekhoda and his colleagues (2009) showed that the number of Iranian English journals that were indexed by WOS and Scopus, had been increased at the study's duration but their visibility in these databases had not good condition(Abdekhoda, Gazi Mirsaid, & Noruzi, 2009)

In an earlier study by Pierz and his colleagues (2006) the studied journals had different results about each criterion but overall they showed good results in compliance with journal selection criteria in ISI database(Pierz, Lopez-Cozar, & Contreras, 2006).

Roales Nieto and O'Neill (2012) done a study on one of Spain's psychology journals and concluded that the studied journal is one of the most important journals in Spain in the field of psychology. The journal was in compliance with the journal selection criteria in selected databases(Roales Nieto & O'Neill, 2012).

Yessirkepov and his colleagues (2015) in a Scopus based analysis of publication activity in Kazakhstan, showed that the number of indexed articles had been steadily growing since 2011. They found that however there were many unresolved issues related to publications, but Kazakhstan's publication activity by scientific authors was higher than that from other countries in central Asia(Yessirkepov et al., 2015).

Shahbodaghi and her colleagues (2017) showed that more than half of the Iranian biomedical journals were not based on the international statements and they did not follow of the journal selection criteria by Scopus(Shahbodaghi, Farhadi, Shekofteh, & Karami, 2017).

Azadeh and his colleagues (2017) conducted a similar study on the status of Iranian medical English journals that had been indexed in the WOS and Scopus databases. Their results showed

that although the journals had been grown in the study duration, they had not been in compliance with the databases' indexing criteria (Azadeh, Ghazi Mirsaeid, Gharib, & Nabiolahi, 2017).

Methods

This study is a descriptive quantitative analysis which deals with the last issues of 52 numbers of IMEJ which have not been indexed in "Web of Science", "Scopus", and "PubMed" to the end of 2014. 465 articles and 11235 references to these issues of journals are surveyed as a population of this study. Data is collected using a researcher-developed checklist whose validity was confirmed by faculty members. The first part of the checklist was allocated to journal's general information including title, year, volume and issue, publication period, publisher, web address, email, and subject field. The studied cases in the second part of the checklist were the rate of Iranian and foreign editors and authors, the rate of indicative and informative abstracts, the rate of structured abstracts, self-citing rate, delay in publication and the amount of this delay, having XML format, having common criteria for online journals. Microsoft Office Excel was used to analyze data.

The main population of this study is non-indexed IMEJ in three selected databases, and this study checked up Scopus' journal selection criteria compliance of this 52 IMEJ and their articles. Average calculated for evaluation of related values to articles and journals.

Results

The last issue of 88.4% of studied journals was published in 2014 and the last 11.6% were published in 2013. 84.6% of journals were specialized and 14.4% were in general field of medical science. 78.8% of reviewed journals have been published quarterly, 17.3% were two-quarterly, and 3.9% were monthly. 76.9% of studied journals were the academic affiliate and 23.1% were dependent to research centers.

Table 1. The frequency distribution percentage of foreign and Iranian editors and writers in studied journals

Percentage	Editors				Authors			
	Foreign		Iranian		Foreign		Iranian	
	No. of editors	Percentage of editors	No. of editors	Percentage of editors	No. of authors	Percentage of authors	No. of authors	Percentage of authors
0	17	32.7	1	1.9	31	59.6	0	0
1-24.9	19	36.5	2	3.9	12	23.1	1	1.9
25-49.9	10	19.2	3	5.8	6	11.5	2	3.9

50-74.9	3	5.8	10	19.2	2	3.9	6	11.5
75-99.9	2	3.9	19	36.5	1	1.9	12	23.1
100	1	1.9	17	32.7	0	0	31	59.6
Total	52	100	52	100	52	100	52	100
Minimum	0		0		0		21.3	
Maximum	100		100		78.7		100	
Average	18.8		81.2		9.9		90.1	
Standard deviation	23.1		23.1		17.7		17.7	

According to table 1, 32.7% of studied journals did not have foreign editors. Also about the geographical distribution of authors, table 1 shows that in more than half of the studied journals all authors were Iranian and just in 5.8% of journals the number of foreign authors was more than Iranian authors.

In content criteria, we examined only the related criteria to abstracts and because the other criteria were qualitative and need to subject specialist, we neglected their investigating. Among the studied journals, 5.8% of articles did not have abstract, 9.8% had indicative abstracts, and 90.2% had informative abstracts. In addition, in studied journals, 48.1% just had informative abstracts, and 51.9% had both indicative and informative abstracts in their articles. Also, there was no journal just with indicative abstracts.

Table 2. The frequency distribution percentage of informative abstracts in studied journals

Percentage of informative abstracts	No. of journals	Percentage of journals
25-49.9	1	1.9
50-74.9	4	7.7
75-99.9	22	42.3
100	25	48.1
Total	52	100
Minimum	40	
Maximum	100	
Average	89.7	

Standard deviation	12.5
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Table 2 shows that just in one of the studied journals the number of indicative abstracts was more than informative abstracts.

Table 3. The frequency distribution percentage of structured abstracts in studied journals

Percentage of structured abstracts	No. of journals	Percentage of journals
0	5	9.6
1-24.9	1	1.9
25-49.9	2	3.9
50-74.9	4	7.7
75-99.9	14	26.9
100	26	50
Total	52	100
Minimum	0	
Maximum	100	
Average	79.2	
Standard deviation	31.7	

77.6% of the articles had structured abstracts. Also, according to table 3, 50% of journals all had structured abstracts and in 9.6% of them, all abstracts were unstructured.

Table4. The frequency distribution of the percentage of self-citation on the authors and reviewed journal's articles

Self-citation on Percentage of self-citation	Article author		reviewed articles	
	No. of articles	Percentage of articles	No. of articles	Percentage of articles
0	291	63.4	407	88.7
1-9.9	112	24.4	35	7.7
10-19.9	37	8.1	10	2.2

20-29.9	12	2.6	2	0.4
30-39.9	2	0.4	2	0.4
40-49.9	2	0.4	1	0.2
More than 50	3	0.7	2	0.4
Total	459	100	459	100
Minimum	0		0	
Maximum	65		60	
average	3.6		1.2	
standard deviation	5.4		2.9	

As mentioned in table 4, 63.4% articles did not have author' self-citation and 88.7% did not have journal' self-citation. In total, self-citation was too low in the articles.

Table5. The frequency distribution of average percent of self-citation on authors and reviewed journals

Self-citation on Self-citation average percent	Article author		Studied journal's articles	
	No. of journals	Percentage of journals	No. of journals	Percentage of journals
0	3	5.8	27	51.9
0.1-1.9	15	28.8	18	34.6
2-3.9	12	23.1	2	3.9
4-5.9	13	25	1	1.9
6-7.9	5	9.6	2	3.9
8-9.9	1	1.9	1	1.9
10-11.9	3	5.8	0	0
More than 12	0	0	1	1.9
Total	52	100	52	100

Minimum	0	0
Maximum	11.5	17
average	3.6	1.2
standard deviation	2.8	2.9

Table 5, shows that more than half of studied journals have no self-citation to journals' articles.

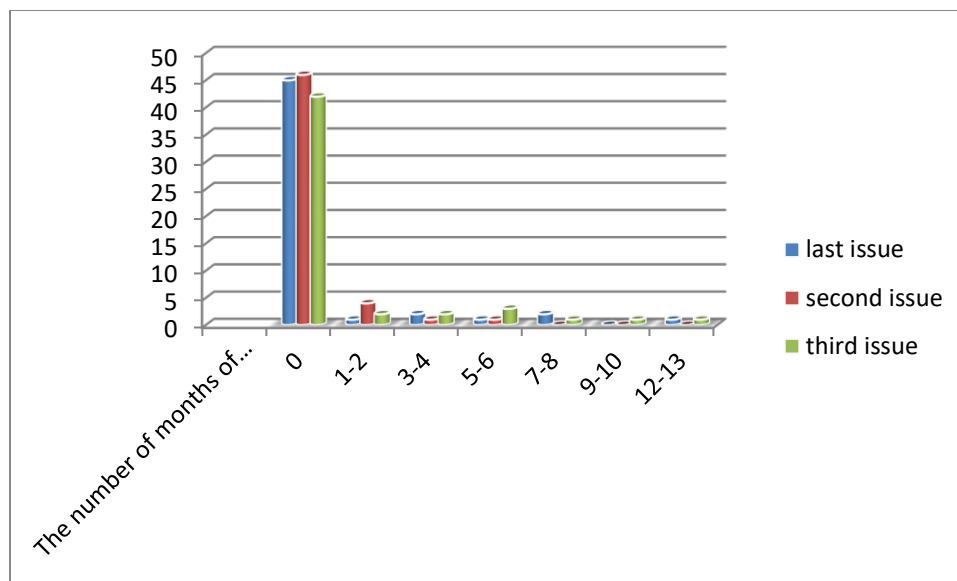


Figure1. The frequency distribution of the delay in the publication the studied journals

About regularity criteria, three last issues of the journals have been studied. 26.9% had a delay in publishing at least in one number, also more than 70% of studied journals had no delay in the last three issues. More than 80% of journals had no delay in publishing of each of the last three issues separately. 13.5% of the last issue, 11.5% of the second issue, and 19.2% of the third issue had at least one month delay in publishing respectively. The most delay in publishes was 13 months. The average of delay in publishing was 0.8 month in the last issue, 0.2 months in the second issue, and 1 month in the third issue (figure 1).

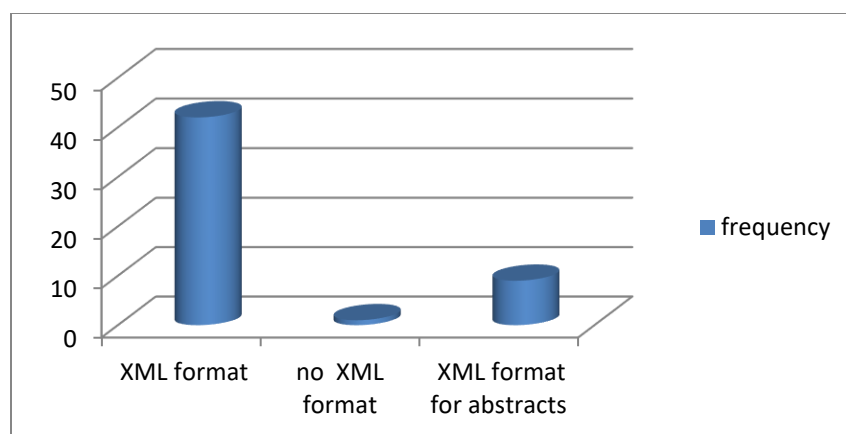


Figure 2. the frequency distribution of having XML format in studied journals

Online access is the last criteria that are being examined by Scopus citation database. Accepted journals in international databases should prepare their files and articles' full text in XML format. Consequently, having XML format is considered as the main criterion. According to figure 2, 80.8% of studied journals provided their full-text XML format, 17.3% provided XML format for their abstracts, and “Galen Medical Journal” was the only journal that did not provide XML format even for its abstracts.

Table 6. The frequency distribution average in terms of having common criteria for online journals

Investigated criteria Journal's status	Arranged archive of previous issues of the journal		Providing EndNote output for articles		Online system for receiving the articles		Having authors' guidelines	
	No. of journals	Percent age of journals	No. of journals	Percent age of journals	No. of journals	Percent age of journals	No. of journals	Percent age of journals
Have	52	100	25	48.1	52	100	38	73.1
Do not have	0	0	27	51.9	0	0	14	26.9
Total	52	100	52	100	52	100	52	100

Having arranged archive of previous issues of journals, the possibility of getting endnote output for articles, having the online system to send and receive the articles, and having transparent descriptions about receiving and Judgment methods for articles, are important criteria with the

important role in promoting journals. Having each one of these criteria is considered as an important score for journals. Table 7 investigates the studied journals by these criteria.

Discussion

Because indexed journals by citation databases can introduce a country's science productions to the universal scientific communications (Yessirkepov et al., 2015), it is vital for authors, decision-makers, institutions, and countries (Taşkın et al., 2015). Being indexed by the most important citation databases needs to fulfill the strict journal selection criteria that are being evaluated by each of citation databases (Abbott, 2017; Abdekhoda & Ravand, 2015). Scopus is one of the multidisciplinary and international databases that cover various fields such as medicine (Adriaanse & Rensleigh, 2013; Hawn Kim, 2016; Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016; Simone II, 2016; Taşkın et al., 2015). In this study, we evaluated 52 number of IMEJ that had not been indexed by WOS, PubMed, and Scopus, based on Scopus' journal selection criteria.

The language criterion needs to have abstract, keywords, and references in English and our findings showed that all of the studied journals were published in English and all of them fulfill the language criterion. Studies were done by Razmgir, Azadeh, and Shahbodaghi had similar findings (Azadeh et al., 2017; Razmgir, 2007; Shahbodaghi et al., 2017). Also about geographical distribution varieties of the authors and editors, the most number of the authors and editors in studied journals were Iranian. In an earlier study, Razmgir showed almost similar findings (Razmgir, 2007). In addition, obtained results from Davarpanah and Behrozfar' research showed that the number of Iranian authors in the studied journals were much more than foreign authors (Behrozfar & Davarpanah, 2009). In Samadi and Mohammad Esmail' research, 16.1% of studied journals had international editors and had relatively similar values with our findings (Samadi & Mohammad Esmail, 2009). Also, in Shahbodaghi and her colleagues study the average of Iranian editors and authors were 83.8% and 94.2% respectively (Shahbodaghi et al., 2017). Findings of Rolls Nieto and O'Neill' research showed that the number of international authors had been increased from 40% in the first four years to 50% in the last year (Roales Nieto & O'Neill, 2012). Totally, according to our results and the findings of the similar mentioned studies about the varieties in geographical distribution of authors and editors, it seems that the cooperation with the foreign authors and editors was low in the last years; consequently, need to improve the cooperation with more foreign editors and publishing more articles of foreign authors are felt.

In content criteria, we examined the abstracts and according to the findings, the most number of studied abstracts were informative. In addition, in more than half of the journals, all abstracts were structured. In Razmgir research, 55% of articles had informative abstracts (Razmgir, 2007) while in a foreign study done by Pierz and his colleagues all abstracts on studied journals were structured and there was no unstructured abstract (Pierz et al., 2006). Also, Azadeh and his colleagues expressed that 80.6% of their studied journals had structured abstracts (Azadeh et al., 2017). In comparison, our studied journals to some extent have acted in accordance with standards of having informative abstracts. Also, the structured abstracts have been grown, but in order to promote and

earn points for being indexed in the international databases, they need to be improved and need more attention in this regard.

About journal's scientific rank we studied self-citations in the studied journals. Self-citation is defined as citations from publications authored or co-authored by author (Chirici, 2012). Our obtained results showed that in total, the rate of self-citation was very low and specifically, self-citations to journals' articles were lower than self-citations to authors themselves. In an earlier study done by Razmgir, similar results were obtained (Razmgir, 2007). Abdekhoda and his colleague calculated the rate of self-citation in their study according to Matthew value and they showed high self-citation average in their studied journals (Abdekhoda & Noruzi, 2011). Also in Ram and his colleagues study the rate of self-citation in the studied journals was high (Ram, Kataria, & Ahmad, 2014). Şahin Danişman and his colleagues calculated the rate of self-citations for each of studied journal separately and they resulted that the rate of self-citations was high and more than 25% (Şahin Danişman et al., 2016). Overall, the average of self-citation in this study is low and does not conflict with the related criteria in Scopus.

In this study, more than 70% of the studied journals were published regularly. Samadi and her colleague showed that 90% of their studied journals were published regularly and had no delay (Samadi & Mohammad Esmail, 2009). Also in two recent studies done by Azadeh and his colleagues, and Shahbodaghi and her colleagues respectively 71%, and 75% of studied journals were published regularly (Azadeh et al., 2017; Shahbodaghi et al., 2017). Obviously, the regular publication is considered as the main criterion and an important score. According to the results of this study and comparison to the most related studies, it can be concluded that significant improvement has happened in regular publication in IMEJ.

We studied online access criteria and according to the findings, 80% of studied journals had full-text XML format. The second criterion in this field was having an archive of journal's previous numbers, that all of the journals had been fulfilling this criterion. Half of the studied journals had Endnote output and all of them had the online system for sending and receiving the articles. In addition, 73% of journals had author's guideline.

Conclusion

According to our findings, studied journals have been in compliance with the most number of journal selection criteria in Scopus database. We can say that compared with similar studies in previous years and particularly in the cases regularity in publishing, providing informative abstracts for articles, limiting the amount of self-citation, providing XML format for articles, online system for sending and receiving the articles, and providing author's guidelines, progress has been shown. The most important weakness in IMEJ was the number of structured abstracts, the low amount of foreign authors and editors, and the low amount of Endnote output. It can be said that advance, improvement, and getting necessary score to enter to Scopus citation database is dependent on more and more precise consideration on journal selection criteria in this database. The most important weakness of reviewed journals was the low level of international cooperation with foreign authors and editors. The journals can provide further cooperation with foreign authors

and editors in the field of relevant expertise. Also, studied journals should provide Endnote output for their articles and publish structured abstracts. Providing instructions and guidelines according to the journal selection criteria in the most important citation databases by responsible institutions, and reform the author's guidelines in the journals according to it, can be an effective strategy in promoting the journals. The mentioned matters can be helper and policy maker of valid and qualified journals. Also, allocation of appropriate funds, create the necessary facilities and training by the authorities, providing by responsible institutions such as Ministry of Health and Medical Education are one of the proposed solutions in order of promotion and improvement in studied journals, with the aim of indexing in the world's reliable databases.

Finally, we should have a notice that the mentioned criteria were the quantitative journal selection criteria in Scopus and if a journal provides only these criteria, it should not expect to be selected by Scopus. The qualitative criteria are the most important part of selecting that needs to subject specialists. We hope our findings could help to studied journals to understand their shortcomings and try to overcome it. Also, we hope our study will be continued by new studies for evaluating journals in order to promote journals' scores continually.

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